



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the Report by Ambassador Ivar Vikki, Head of the OSCE Center in Almaty

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 2, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

Welcome back to the Permanent Council, Ambassador Vikki. In the five months since your last appearance, we have spent a lot of time discussing Kazakhstan in this forum, and with good reason. We have welcomed Kazakhstan's expressed interest in playing a leadership role in the region, and in the OSCE. The United States wants to do all it can to help Kazakhstan become a leading example of stability, prosperity, and democratic reform in Central Asia. And the OSCE can continue to play an important role in support of peaceful democratization in Kazakhstan and the broader region.

The government of Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstani people deserve praise for the strides their country has made in fostering religious tolerance and inter-ethnic accord no small feat in a place as large and diverse as Kazakhstan. Hosting the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, as well as the OSCE Tolerance Implementation Meeting, both during 2006, demonstrates the government of Kazakhstan's focus on promoting mutual understanding. We encourage the government to continue its efforts and to draw upon OSCE expertise in so doing.

A particular area where the OSCE can offer unrivaled expertise is that of election-related issues. We understand that the OSCE Center and ODIHR are engaged constructively with Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission on a number of ODIHR's suggested election-related reforms. We urge this cooperation to continue and intensify.

In his address to the Permanent Council last week, Foreign Minister Tokayev highlighted the current goals of Kazakhstan's State Commission on Democratic Reforms. We support the State Commission's work to strengthen representative institutions that invest its citizens in the political process, such as an independent media, direct election of local authorities, and free and fair elections that meet international standards and reflect Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments. The United States believes that developing democratic institutions and respecting human rights are absolutely essential for Kazakhstan's long-term stability.

We urge the government of Kazakhstan to use the expertise and assistance of the OSCE Center to undertake activities in support of these steps. As noted in our response to Foreign Minister Tokayev's address, further progress in these areas will advance Kazakhstan's candidacy for a future chairmanship of this organization.

In addition, the United States encourages the government of Kazakhstan to draw upon recommendations made in the report recently presented by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Haraszti in adopting a new media law in line with OSCE commitments.

Fostering a sense of security among citizens and trust in local law enforcement is a big responsibility, but with far-reaching positive repercussions. We are pleased to learn of the progress made on OSCE-supported projects aimed at studying, and eventually implementing, best practices on community policing and bolstering public oversight of police activities.

In the economic and environmental sphere, the official inauguration of a joint water management commission between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will be, we hope, an important step toward addressing the critical issue of the sharing of water resources in this region, and is a good example of how the OSCE can work effectively with other international organizations, each bringing its own expertise to the table.

Ambassador Vikki, the United States is deeply appreciative of the fine work you and your staff are doing on behalf of the OSCE in Kazakhstan. We recognize that you will be facing additional logistical burdens as you seek to move the OSCE Center's main office to Astana in the next six months. Nevertheless, we encourage your continued activities in all three dimensions. You can continue to count on the full backing of the United States in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.